

SVA: ten years of smalls scale support to community radio in Sub Saharan Africa - looking back to strategize for the future

Request for proposals for an independent portfolio evaluation

Introduction

For over 60 years Stem Van Afrika (SVA), an independent foundation registered in the Netherlands, has funded projects undertaken by community radio stations in Afrika. Over the past 10 years SVA has made grants for nearly 800.000 euro for (small) projects in support of community radio in (mainly Eastern) Africa. The grants have been assessed, monitored and administered by [CAMECO](https://www.cameco.org) - (<https://www.cameco.org>), who provided these services to SVA under an MoU.

Drawing on this experience and its network of partners, SVA is currently rethinking its strategy, considering what it funds and how it funds and supports community media with a particular focus on community radio and their – hybrid - use of new media.

In principle, SVA wishes to continue to keep a strong focus on the development of community media, as opposed to mobilizing community media for development goals. While this focus does not exclude support to content production for development goals, or activities that focus on developing communities, it will limit support in these categories to activities that are considered instrumental to the development of a (group of) community media actor(s), for example through experimenting with new technologies and formats.

SVA expects to continue to focus on Sub Saharan Africa, particularly countries it has been working in earlier. It is also open to regional initiatives incorporating multiple countries.

While SVA will keep its original mission and focus, it wishes to drastically change how it funds and supports community radio stations. In particular, it wishes to abandon traditional “control-driven” practices where all the decision-making power remains with the northern funder and its agents. SVA is also prepared to consider strategies that over time spend-out the foundation’s endowment, instead of continuing to use for its mission only the income generated over its capital.

Context

There is no reliable data on how many community radio stations operate in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some estimate that over 2000 community radio stations exist in Sub-Saharan Africa, but that figure excludes Central Africa.

Similarly, there is no exact definition of what a community radio is and what is not. A key feature is participation and connectedness with a local community, but degrees and forms of participation vary widely. While stations are generally non-profit, the ownership structure, governance, funding- and business models vary.

In different countries different policy and regulatory regimes govern community radio, some have features that strengthen independent community radio, others leave the sector quite vulnerable to misuse and even abuse.

Sustainability (financial) seems to be a universal challenge for community radio in Africa. Also, there seems to be an over reliance on donor funding. The rise of internet and cell-phone coverage in Africa provides opportunities as well as challenges (financial and technological).

In several African countries there are national associations where actors in the field of community radio come together. With the demise of AMARC-Africa, there is no (longer) an organization that does so at supra national level.

Evaluation goal, use and users and stakeholder involvement

SVA wishes to conduct an independent evaluation of its portfolio since 2015 to inform and shape its new strategy. The primary user of the evaluation report will be the Board of SVA, but the results may also be useful to (and be used by) other stakeholders.

Important stakeholders such as past grantees and CAMECO, will be involved as informants. Also, listeners / audiences should somehow have a voice in the process. At the same time, the evaluators are explicitly invited to involve other actors that are active in community radio in countries where SVA works or has worked. The design of the evaluation process should be sufficiently flexible to create ample space for all stakeholders to raise additional views and concerns (beyond the evaluation questions).

Finally, acknowledging that evaluators may also have agendas, SVA requires a maximum of transparency towards stakeholders throughout the process.

Sharing of evaluation results

SVA will publish a summary of findings and the recommendations of the evaluation on its website as a way of being accountable to its past and current partners and the public.

The full report will be shared with all stakeholders that are directly involved in the evaluation process, with the request to use in public the summary and recommendations.

Evaluation scope

Between 2015 and 2025, SVA has made 27 grants to 18 organizations in eight (8) countries in Africa for a total amount of nearly 800.000 euros. The countries where grantees were located are Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, DRC, Burkina Faso, DRC, Malawi and Cameroon, with almost three quarter of the funds granted to organizations in the first three countries. The evaluation should cover this entire portfolio, in the understanding that not all projects have been completed and that therefore some evaluation questions may not be applicable to all projects. Also, from a perspective of efficiency, it could be considered to look into some cases in depth while reviewing general aspects of the entire portfolio.

The evaluation should cover the entire (grantmaking) process from the decision of the recipient organization to apply for funding from SVA until after the conclusion of the project and the fulfillment of all administrative requirements related to the grant.

Evaluation Questions

SVA envisions strong, viable, community media, particularly radio stations, that reach broad audiences and are well-rooted in the communities they serve. It is therefore of the greatest importance that these radio stations and communities have a decisive voice in this evaluation.

In view of this goal, questions the Board of SVA wishes the evaluators to explore are:

- Has SVA supported the right actors in the right way?
- Did SVA's support fit the needs and realities in their organizations and the context(s) in which they operate?
- How did SVA's support take into account gender dimensions? Did its support contributed towards gender equity
- Did the support empower recipients, and did it provide flexibility to adapt and cope?
- What evidence can be found of a multiplier effect of the SVA support / to what extent did the SVA support benefit the community radio sector rather than a single station?
- What missed opportunities can be identified?

- To what extent did the SVA support enhance the sustainability of the beneficiary?
- Did the funding process, or the scale and nature of the support exclude potential partners, relevant actors in the field?
- In view of its mission to develop community radio, what specific features of SVA support enhance or limit the effectiveness of its support?
- How did the restrictions as to what SVA funds and what not, play out in terms of the relevance and effectiveness of SVA's support to the development of community radio?

Request for proposals

SVA invites consultants who combine in their team expertise in evaluations and in the development of community radio and -media, to submit proposals to conduct an independent evaluation addressing the questions above. The team should be based in Sub-Saharan Africa and be bilingual English and French.

The evaluation should start in January 2025 and be concluded in May 2025 at the latest.

It is important to SVA that this evaluation involves a broad range of stakeholders from the eight (8) countries where SVA has supported radio stations and – organizations, and possibly other relevant actors in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The proposal should describe in detail the methodology that will be used and the deliverables that are expected to be produced. It also should describe how different stakeholders (beyond members of the SVA Board) will be involved in the process. It would be desirable to include in the process an in-person meeting involving stakeholders somewhere in the region, preferably towards the end to discuss findings and recommendations.

The maximum available budget for the evaluation is 35.000 euro. This budget should include all imaginable costs, such as fees, communication and translation costs as well as the travel of consultants and stakeholders (though it may exclude travel cost of SVA Board members). There would be no need for consultants to travel to Europe.

Proposals describing the methodology and design of the evaluation process, and including CVs of the consultants involved and a detailed budget, are to be submitted before 6 December 2024 24:00 CET at: info@stemvanafrika.nl